

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, BL

SUBJ: STRAINS INCREASE IN CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS

REFERENCE: LA PAZ 7554, 7995

1. ON JANUARY 13, POLICE DISMANTLED FOUR RADIO STATIONS IN THE MINING AREAS CHARGING THEM WITH SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES AND INCITING THE MINERS TO STRIKE (SEE SEPTTEL). ONE OF THE RADIOS, PIUS XII, WAS THE PROPERTY OF THE OBLATES, A MISSIONARY ORDER OF THE CHURCH. REPORTEDLY, FIVE OF THE MISSIONARIES WERE ARRESTED WHEN THE STATION WAS RAIDED. THE OBLATES STRONGLY IDENTIFY WITH THE MINERS WITH WHOM THEY HAVE WORKED FOR YEARS. THE OBLATES DESCRIBE THE SUPPORT THEY AND THEIR RADIO GIVE THE MINERS AS "HUMAN PROMOTION", AN OFFICIAL PROGRAM OF THE BOLIVIAN CHURCH, AND THEY INTEND TO HAVE THE BOLIVIAN BISHOPS INTERCEDE FOR THE PROMPT RESTORATION OF RADIO PIUS XII TO THEIR CONTROL. HOW THE BISHOPS WILL REACT TO THIS INCIDENT IS NOT YET KNOWN.

2. THE GOB ACTION AGAINST RADIO PIUS XII IS THE LATEST IN A SERIES OF INCIDENTS STRETCHING BACK TO DECEMBER WHICH HAVE STRAINED RELATIONS BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE. THE FOLLOWING INCIDENTS WERE AMONG THE MORE SERIOUS:

A. ON DECEMBER 14, FR. ERIC DE WEISEGE, PRESIDENT OF THE COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, WAS ARRESTED

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AND CHARGED WITH MEDDLING IN BOLIVIA'S INTERNAL POLITICS.

THE CHARGE WAS BASED ON THE COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE'S CALL FOR POLITICAL AMNESTY. FR. ERIC, A BELGIAN DOMINICAN PRIEST, WAS GIVEN 24 HOURS TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY, BUT HE REFUSED TO COMPLY UNLESS ORDERED TO DO SO BY THE BOLIVIAN BISHOPS CONFERENCE. CHURCH AND STATE BEGAN NEGOTIATING HIS CASE. THE GOB SAID IT WOULD BE WILLING TO LET FR. ERIC REMAIN IN THE COUNTRY IF HE LEFT THE COMMISSION, BUT THE CHURCH COUNTERED THAT IT COULD NOT PERMIT THE GOB TO NAME MEMBERS OF CHURCH COMMISSIONS. EVENTUALLY, DISCUSSIONS ON FR. ERIC'S STATUS WERE LEFT TO THE PAPAL NUNCIO AND THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS.

B. ON JANUARY 9, POLICE PURSUED FR. ERIC INTO THE PRECINCTS OF THE ARCHBISHOP'S OFFICES. THE POLICE WITHDREW ONLY AFTER THE ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICIALS CALLED THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR.

C. ON JANUARY 11, POLICE RAIDED THE HOUSE OF EX-PRESIDENT DR. LUIS ADOLFO SILES SALINAS, THE MOST PROMINENT BOLIVIAN LAYMAN ASSOCIATED WITH THE COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE.

D. ON JANUARY 12, PRESENCIA PUBLISHED A LETTER OF THE COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE ON THE GOB'S ECONOMIC POLICY. THE LETTER CAME OUT AGAINST ANY MEASURES WHICH WOULD RAISE PRICES TO BOLIVIAN CONSUMERS. THE COMMISSION CHARGED THAT GOB ECONOMIC POLICY DENIED WORKERS ANY BENEFITS IN GOOD YEARS (1974) BUT MADE THEM SUFFER THE FULL BRUNT OF BAD YEARS (1975).

3. DESPITE THE FACT THAT NEITHER CHURCH NOR STATE HAVE ANYTHING TO GAIN FROM CONFRONTATION AND THAT LEADERS IN BOTH INSTITUTIONS HAVE EXPRESSED THE DESIRE TO AVOID FRICTION, THEIR RELATIONS DETERIORATE FROM DAY TO DAY. THE GOB'S ARGUMENT THAT POLICE ACTION AGAINST MISGUIDED PRIESTS IS NOT AIMED AT THE CHURCH AS AN INSTITUTION IS UNACCEPTABLE TO CHURCH LEADERS WHO WISH TO PRESERVE A ROLE IN SOCIAL ACTION FOR THE CHURCH EVEN IF THEY DO NOT ALWAYS ENDORSE THE ACTIVITIES OF INDIVIDUAL CLERGYMEN 100 PERCENT. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE GOB'S GENERAL CRACKDOWN ON THE OPPOSITION AND ON ELEMENTS IN THE CHURCH WAS ACCENTUATED IN LATE DECEMBER AND JANUARY AS THE GOB WRESTLED WITH THE PROBLEM OF ISSUING NEW AND PROBABLY UNPOPULAR ECONOMIC MEASURES. NOW THAT THE GOB HAS APPARENTLY DECIDED AGAINST

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A PACKAGE OF ECONOMIC MEASURES, (SEPARATE CABLE BEING SENT) IT MAY BE ABLE TO RELAX ITS PRESSURE AND CONFLICTS WITH THE CHURCH MAY SUBSIDE.

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